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SUBJECT: UNSC: JUNE MIDDLE EAST BRIEFING

¶1. Summary: During the monthly briefing on Middle East issues to the Security Council June 21, UN U/SYG Ibrahim Gambari reviewed recent events, including intra-Palestinian political developments and the welcome prospect of an imminent Olmert-Abbas meeting; an increase in violence resulting in death and injury to civilians; the deteriorating Palestinian economic and humanitarian situation and the importance of the establishment of the temporary international mechanism (TIM); restrictions on UN staff at the Erez crossing; and developments in Lebanese politics and violence along the Blue Line. In the closed consultations that followed, Council members acknowledged Israel's right to self-defense, but called for a proportional response, looked forward to negotiations between Palestinian factions and between Israelis and Palestinians, and applauded the EU-sponsored TIM. Japan announced that Prime Minister Koizumi would visit the Middle East prior to the July G-8 meeting. In response to inquiries from the Japanese and Argentineans, U/SYG Gambari said that the UN did not plan to investigate the June 9 Gaza City beach incident, noting an independent investigation requires the agreement and cooperation of both parties. In addition to her prepared remarks, Ambassador Sanders recommended the Council reconsider the format for Middle East briefings. She suggested the sessions be scheduled as either meetings open to the public or consultations limited to the Council and Secretariat, observing that the current hybrid format provides neither transparency nor confidentiality. End Summary.

Intra-Palestinian Issues; Civilian Casualties; TIM

¶2. In the monthly briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East held June 21, UN Under-Secretary-General (U/SYG) for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari reviewed key political developments, the security situation, the fiscal and humanitarian situation, issues of movement and access, and the situation in Lebanon. Gambari noted PA President Abbas' June 10 call for a July 26 referendum on the "Covenant for National Reconciliation" and the Palestinian Authority government's concern about the legality and desirability of such a referendum; intra-Palestinian consultations on the status of the special force created by the Palestinian Interior Minister; and a possible June 22 meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in Petra.

¶3. On the security situation, Gambari said that Israel had "stepped up its policy of targeted killings and the shelling of areas in Gaza from which rockets continued to be fired at Israeli territory." Citing recent Israeli operations, Gambari said the Secretary-General was disturbed by a pattern of civilian deaths or injuries, especially the deaths of several children. Regarding the June 9 explosion on a Gaza City beach resulting in the death of seven civilians, Gambari reported the results of the IDF investigation and the fact

that Human Rights Watch has disputed that conclusion. Gambari also said the Israeli investigation is continuing. During the month the UN recorded 176 rockets fired by Palestinian militants from Gaza toward Israeli territory; Gambari reported that Hamas had claimed responsibility for rockets launched at Israel. Finally Gambari noted Hamas-Fatah clashes, resulting in the killing of local leaders and claiming the lives of many bystanders.

¶ 14. On fiscal and humanitarian matters, Gambari said that the continued non-transfer of Palestinian taxes collected by Israel has affected the delivery of some Palestinian Authority services and that the economy is experiencing decline: the Palestinian GDP fell by seven percent and unemployment rose by six percent in the first three months of 2006. He said the Secretary-General "is pleased" by the Quartet's endorsement of the EU temporary international mechanism (TIM) to facilitate needs-based assistance directly to the Palestinian people.

¶ 15. On movement and access, Gambari said that strict Israeli security measures have been impeding the movement of UN staff in and out of Gaza since February; and that Israeli settlement activity and barrier construction has been continuing despite the Road Map and recent Quartet expressions of concern. On Lebanon, Gambari reviewed Blue Line violations during the reporting period, including Israeli air violations and Hezbollah fire from Lebanese territory. Finally, Gambari noted progress on Lebanese electoral reform and continued work being carried out via the Lebanese National Dialogue, the eighth round of which convened on June 8. (Note: Text of Statement e-mailed to department June 22).

Council Members Comment

¶ 16. In their comments in the closed consultations following the open briefing, Council members focused on the recent violence resulting in death and injury to bystanders, particularly children, and on the Palestinian fiscal and humanitarian situation. Council members condemned actions that led to civilian deaths and injury. Urging restraint by both sides, they said that Palestinians should stop firing rockets from Gaza into Israeli territory. While recognizing Israel's right of self-defense, many Council members argued that such actions should be proportional and carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law. Several members noted their opposition to Israeli extrajudicial killings.

¶ 17. On political developments, members urged direct talk between Israel and the Palestinians; welcomed the scheduled June 22 Olmert-Abbas meeting in Petra; and hoped for progress in talks between Palestinian factions. Many members expressed concern about the prospect of unilateral Israeli actions that might prejudice the final outcome of status negotiations. A number of speakers reiterated the necessity of Hamas adhering to the Quartet principles. On the deteriorating Palestinian economic and humanitarian situation outlined in U/SYG Gambari's representation, Council members welcomed the EU TIM proposal and the Quartet's endorsement.

¶ 18. Speaking for the U.S., Ambassador Sanders expressed U.S. concern over reports of recent civilian casualties, called on the Palestinian Authority to act to prevent all acts of terrorism and urged the Israeli government to use restraint in exercising its right of self-defense. She made clear the Palestinian Authority government's failure to take action on terrorism is unacceptable and counterproductive to Palestinian interests. Ambassador Sanders reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to meeting the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, reviewed U.S. assistance, endorses the EU TIM proposal, and urged other donors to participate through this mechanism or through other established international mechanisms. On Lebanon and Syria, Ambassador Sanders called on Syria and Iran to cease sponsorship and support of terrorist groups responsible for periodic attacks on Israel

from Lebanese territory, called for the disarming and disbanding of all militias in Lebanon, including Hezbollah, commended International Independent Investigation Commission Commissioner Brammertz for providing strong leadership into the investigation of the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and reiterated Syria's obligation to comply fully and unconditionally with the commission as required by UNSCR 1595, 1636 and 1644.

Japan PM Proposes Visit; U.S. Proposes New Briefing Format

¶ 9. Japanese PR Oshima announced that Prime Minister Koizumi would visit Israel, Palestine, and Jordan prior to the upcoming G-8 Summit. Oshima said Koizumi would indicate Japan's support for President Abbas' policy of urging Hamas to change its position on Israel, reaffirm Japan's commitment to financial assistance for Palestinians, and urge Israel to refrain from taking any unilateral actions that would prejudice the final settlement. In response to a query by the Japanese PR and the Argentinean PR Mayoral about a possible UN investigation into the June 9 Gaza City Beach incident, Gambari said such an investigation would require the agreement and cooperation of both parties and that the UN was contemplating no action at this time.

¶ 10. Raising significant U.S. concerns about a procedural issue, Ambassador Sanders said that the U.S. thinks it is time to rethink the format of Middle East briefings. She suggested that the sessions be scheduled as either meetings open to the public or consultations limited to Council members and the Secretariat. She said that the current practice of open briefings by the Secretariat followed by closed consultations of the Council provided neither transparency nor confidentiality, and characterized this hybrid approach as "least optimal." If what the Secretariat has to say merits an open session, then the views of Council members should be shared publicly, as well. Alternatively, the views of Council members and the Secretariat could be exchanged in closed consultations. Danish Security Council President PR Loj said she would refer the matter to Political Coordinators for discussion, and agreed the format merited review. U/SYG Gambari, in a handwritten note passed to Ambassador Sanders during the Council interventions, urged the U.S. "to carry further your very useful query on the format of these briefings." He suggested the Council consider the following issues: "(1) is it best use of senior Secretariat staff time to deliver rather long briefings and

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to sit through equally long statements by delegations; (2) regularity of briefings; (3) lack of any concrete Council

action as a consequence of briefings!!; and (4) few Perm Representatives are in attendance."

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